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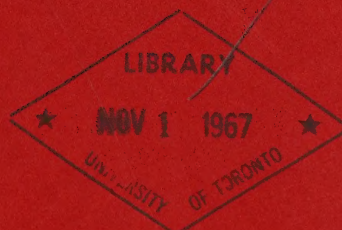
Don. Special Planning Secretariat

MEETING POVERTY



FACE
À LA
PAUVRETÉ

Volunteer Brain Agitators—Community Style,



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VOLUNTEER BRAIN AGITATORS - COMMUNITY STYLE

"Let each become all that he was created capable of being."

Thomas Carlyle, 1795-1881.


This report describes a working solution to a problem that has plagued children before and since Carlyle's time. The problem often originates in parents who are discouraged and without hope. Being so, they fail to give the love, encouragement and inspiration their children need to develop normally. Unless something attractive and vigorous is added to these situations, how can one expect the children to rise out of their environment and achieve?

The added element in many Ottawa families is the personal interest and enthusiasm of University students and parents who volunteer some of their spare time. They use it to work with small groups of children on school subjects and in varied recreation.

The school work is done in an informal, friendly, participating atmosphere. The recreation enters new and exciting areas previously not readily available to these children, such as guitar, ballet and ceramics.

This effective and fascinating program began several months ago for Grade 7 boys in a Separate School in Ottawa. It has already been adopted by two other schools. Principals of Public Schools who have been approached by volunteers in their districts are standing by, awaiting the approval of the Board to let the process start in their schools and to receive the benefits.

Let us now relate this program to others in Ottawa. A number of emotionally disturbed children are being helped by volunteers from the University Womens' Club. They are directed by Mrs. Wickett of your Department of Psychology. That program is admirable in its approach and techniques. Another group of children are being assisted by a work and recreational project at Domion-Chalmers United Church, guided by the Ottawa Welfare Bureau. The program spreading through the Separate Schools picks up children who are not emotionally disturbed but are under-achievers in one or more subjects. A brief description of this program follows.



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The program, very briefly, channels the desire of members of Kairos and Young People's organizations in United Churches, of Young Men's Seminaries, of people in the Company of Young Canadians, and of parents, to do something significant for others in need. They are volunteers who, under the guidance of the principals and teachers of the schools, review specific areas of knowledge in science, English, new math., etc., at grade 7 and 8 levels. They meet with groups of boys and girls whose parents have requested that they be given extra assistance to learn the subjects in which they have had low grades. The environment is the living room or recreation room of a private home, or spare rooms in United and Catholic Churches. The activities occur Monday through Thursday from 7 to 8:30.

The help they receive is the patient reiteration of material from the text books. Informal discussions amongst the group have a strong, desirable effect on students who have been doing and thinking too little. It may take upwards of one hour for an individual to get a particular point, but the volunteers feel that the effort has been worth it. This type of patient work with slow learners gets results. No doubt it would be more efficiently carried out in school, but to do this for numbers of needful children would require larger teaching staffs.

Guitar, ballet, and ceramics classes on Friday evenings and on Saturdays form the recreational program. Attendance at the study groups is mandatory if a boy or girl wants to take part in the recreation program. These are naturally the highlights of the week. It is during these times that tensions are further relaxed. This affects progress quite strongly and the children, once neglected at home and unachieving in school, turn into happier learners.

The scale of the program at mid-March was as follows:

- (a) St. George's -- 40 students in evening study classes. Another 60 in Grades 2 to 6 are being helped daily at school by good students in Grade 7 and 8 on a "buddy" system.
- (b) St. Theresa's -- some 40 students in regular study groups and recreational system.
- (c) St. Brigid's -- some 25 students in regular study groups and recreational classes.

The attached statements^{1/} show that the individual students are becoming "easier to live with" both at school and at home. The effects are so favourable and the reaction of parents so enthusiastic that they are also volunteering.

The program is relaxing many children. All the time necessary for each individual to "have his brain waked up" is being supplied. The program only began in November, so it may be premature to predict that individuals will graduate from the study groups, continue on in school under their own power, and make room for others to enter this program.

Excellent remedial services are available to salvage and re-orient emotionally disturbed children to begin achieving and to attain some hope of a successful future. The program described here tries to pick up the less disturbed children.

What the volunteers are doing is not in opposition to the daytime teaching. It provides the tremendous increase of time that some individual students must have to start to make progress. The fact that the children enjoy it is not to be doubted. The most effective discipline is to threaten to refuse further attendance to anyone who misbehaves.

How to Organize for this Effect

Many schools in Ottawa are surrounded by people, young adults and parents, who have a reasonable level of education. They also have a good deal of spare time. Gratifying numbers are willing to volunteer their time to help others.

The Principals of the schools have the problems, can describe the varieties, know who has low grades in what subjects, and know those boys and girls who are rather likely to fail a grade. Many of these Principals are strongly in favour of getting volunteer help of the type being arranged in the Separate School system. There seems no doubt that between the group of normally-achieving children and those who must have remedial services provided to them, there remains a fair-sized group who are under-achieving and who have little sense of self-discipline.

^{1/} S.P.S. Footnote: A statement by the Company of Young Canadians and letters of appreciation have been omitted in this reproduction of the Report. A statement on "School Completion" is attached.

While the Principals are the focal point for volunteer assistance, it is the teachers who know specifically what the individuals need. So in the program described it is the teachers who direct their own small group of volunteers. The size of the group depends on the number of students in need of help in the different subjects.

The Principals would welcome the organizing assistance of the Presidents of their Home and School Associations, or of their delegates. Through these key people would flow requirements for volunteers, setting up of schedules, arrangements for space for both the academic and the cultural aspects of the program. It is understood that the Home and School Associations will be strongly supported by the council to become active and effective in this Board program.

The participation of young people in this program inspires parents to volunteer their time, and space in their homes. That stage is much to be desired, as it means the school district begins to be self-supporting and, more important, parents take up more of their normal role.

Conclusions

In order to put the quotation from Carlyle into an Ottawa context, let us accept its challenge. We should aim to "wake up the brains" and stir the motivation of those students in grade school who tend to fail, even a single subject, let alone a school year. Such failures are calamities in terms of lost confidence and wasted time.

Looking beyond Public School, this should have the effect of reducing the numbers of High School drop-outs dramatically. Some students who fail in High School and had the symptoms years before in grades 6,7, or 8, or even earlier, had a learning problem.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made up to implement the program described in this report:

(a) The Public School Board

Instruct the Principals of the Public Schools in Ottawa that they may utilize the volunteers for study groups during after-school hours.

(b) The Principals

- (1) Ask the teachers for the names of boys and girls who get low grades in tests and examinations.
- (2) Describe to the authorized representative of the volunteers the numbers of students in each subject needing help.
- (3) Obtain permission from those parents who wish their children to take part in these extra study groups.

(c) The Teachers

- (1) Treat the volunteers as a source of many valuable hours of time for boys and girls who need more personal attention, more recognition and more repetition of material from the text books, than can ever be done during school hours.
- (2) Outline to the volunteer(s) the areas in the school texts that need most attention.
- (3) Meet with the volunteers monthly, or oftener as mutually arranged, to discuss the work and its relation to the recreation program.

(d) The Responsible Organization

(depending on the School District, this may be the Home and School Association, or the Social Service Committee of the local United Church)

- (1) Provide a co-ordinating manager for the volunteers, their scheduling, and necessary space for the academic and recreational programs. The manager selected must have sufficient time and interest to keep the program rolling for his school.
- (2) Provide volunteers who can be depended on to carry out their commitments.
- (3) Find space for the various activities.

(e) The Volunteers

(Young people have added a new element to an old situation. They come from United Church groups, Seminaries, Company of Young Canadians. Their enthusiasm spreads to parents who then volunteer as well.)

- (1) Offer fixed time per week for subjects they can handle--study groups Monday through Thursday and recreational classes on Friday and Saturday.
- (2) Insure their regular attendance to prove their interest in the children.
- (3) Provide warm, friendly concern for each individual in their class of 4 to 6.

This submission is our out-growth of an active program being carried on for High School students in Ottawa by the Christian Social Service Committee of Woodroffe United Church.

(Note: Report sent to the Ottawa Public School Board by the Christian Social Service Committee, Woodroffe United Church, Ottawa, March 28, 1966)

Supporting Material

School Completion and The High School Drop-Out

Let us define School Completion as the progress of each individual in the Ottawa School system to the educational standard or level suitable to his or her mental capabilities. Ordinarily this would mean the graduation from High School or a Trade School.

Some students drop out of High School. This is too often a personal tragedy and a national loss. The symptoms of drop-out can appear in public school as a learning problem, exhibited by low grades in some subjects, poor conduct, failure to pass. Such students become objects of extreme concern to school authorities, to teachers, and especially to their parents.

Where there is slow learning, there could be a real difficulty to learn. There could also be emotional problems, not severe enough to require professional attention, but severe enough to reduce the rate of learning below the desired level. Teachers have to keep progressing as fast as the average learners can manage to complete the curriculum for the year. Slow learners can get farther and farther behind in one or more subjects. They can become discouraged. Discouragement is expressed differently by a child than by a mature person who would decide to work harder, seek help, and so rise out of his difficulties. The children have never been taught to study, so they cannot spend their evenings to their own profit. They begin to rebel at home and at school.

This is a problem that their parents should tackle. But sometimes the slowness to learn originated in a rather unfriendly atmosphere at home, so in such cases the parents are the least likely to provide the kindly patience that is the antidote to the tension within the student.

